

Part 4

Read the article and answer the questions. Write a maximum of five words for each answer. An example is done for you.

Twitter followers 'can be bought'

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read each other's updates, known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters, displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to other users - known as followers - who have subscribed to said page.

But now, Twitter users who lack an audience for their messages can buy followers. Australian social media marketing company meNet is offering a paid service that finds followers for Twitter users. Followers are available in blocks starting at £53 for 1,000. The biggest block meNet is selling is 100,000 followers. meNet says businesses and individuals are queuing up to use its follower-finding service.

The chief executive of meNet, said the company finds potential followers by searching Twitter and working out what individual users are interested in. meNet then sends messages to potential followers telling them about the new Twitter user they might want to follow. "It's up to the user to follow them or not," he said. He added that meNet continues to look for followers until the specified number the customer paid for has signed up. A broad range of clients have signed up to buy followers, including educational organisations, companies and marketing firms. "A woman who runs yoga classes is one of our clients," he said. "So are some religious organisations including one man that just wants to get the word out about God."

Twitter started simply as a way for friends to keep in touch but, as with any social media site, once it gets big every business and marketing company jumps on the bandwagon. "It's an excellent marketing tool," claims the chief executive of meNet. meNet estimated that each follower on Twitter was worth about 10 cents a month to a company that got them to sign up.

The research director at Hitwise who has analysed Twitter growth, said businesses were definitely starting to sign up to Twitter. However, the growing commercial use of Twitter is presenting the network with a few problems. In particular, Hitwise was starting to see the hijacking of hashtags - labels that bring all the messages about a subject together. For example, furnishings firm Homelanded used tags associated with protests in Syria to attempt to drive people to the Homelanded's site. The firm has since apologised for its actions. However Twitter might cope better with the creeping commercialisation than other social media sites. It has the advantage that it can change quickly if hashtags become a polluted medium and it might keep one step ahead of the spammers. "We've yet to see people giving Twitter up for the next big thing" he says.

Example: What sort of service is Twitter?
social networking or microblogging

1. What are the writer's tweets displayed on?

2. How does meNet choose followers for their clients?

3. How many followers can a client buy?

4. Who decides if a user will follow a client?

5. Who was caught highjacking hashtags?

6. How has this company responded to being caught?

7. Why is Twitter able to keep ahead of the spammers?

Total: 7 marks
Total marks for Reading: 26